

**An Essay on Academic Disciplines, Faithfulness, and the Christian Scholar**

**By Paul Gould**

Christian scholars inhabit two communities: the community of Christians and the community of scholars. Each community has its own distinctive set of beliefs, practices, and criteria for membership. To avoid incoherence, the Christian scholar rightly asks and seeks to understand the relationship between these two communities. What does faithfulness to Christ mean for the Christian scholar in the academy? Part of the answer has to do with the integration of faith and scholarship. Christian scholars who seek to integrate their academic vocation—their teaching, research, and service—with their Christian faith often find few clear models to emulate. This challenge is compounded by the fact that the scholarly life differs greatly across disciplines, increasing the difficulty of prescribing a universal approach to integrating faith and scholarship. In this essay, I engage the topic of integration by exploring the notion of an academic discipline, focusing primarily on the integration of faith and scholarship, and when appropriate, the implications for teaching and service. I discuss (1) an underappreciated motive for faith-scholarship integration, (2) the nature of an academic discipline, (3) the anatomy of an academic discipline, and (4) missional connections within an academic discipline.

**The Christian Scholar and Mission of God**

A Christian scholar can find several reasons to integrate faith and scholarship. Because truth is a unity, compartmentalization of one's faith commitments and one's scholarly discipline is effectively denying God's lordship over all of life (Hasker, 1992). Vocational integrity requires that Christian scholars allow their faith to inform their scholarship (Hughes, 2005). God has called Christians to excellence in all activities of life, including scholarship (Kostenberger,

2011). Jesus Christ provides the foundation, motive, and sustenance for learning (Noll, 2011).

For these reasons, integration of faith and scholarship is a vital function of a Christian academic.

The above reasons gain greater meaning and significance within the larger framework of God's story as articulated in the Bible (Robinson, 2003). Drawing on this grand narrative of Scripture can help Christian scholars develop a more robust model of faithfulness. Failing to fully appreciate the biblical narrative has produced many disparate and truncated views on the integration of faith and scholarship (e.g., Claerbaut, 2004; Harris, 2004; Hughes, 2005; Marsden, 1997; Mellichamp, 1997; Poe 2004). Although these authors address the topic of integrating faith and scholarship, by failing to clearly define academic disciplines or placing such integration within the grand narrative of Scripture, they overlook a key component of faithfulness.

Faithfulness to Christ “works itself out in the context of complex social, political, economic, and cultural forces that prevail at a particular time and place” (Hunter, 2010, p. 197), and within a particular age of revealed history, as well. In a fallen world at a time between the first and second coming of Christ, proclaiming the gospel throughout the world (Matthew 28:19-20) as witnesses for Christ, provides hope to a sin-shattered, shalom-violated world. Effective Christian witness requires more than sincerity and devotion to Christ, however; it also requires attention to God's unfolding story as well as wisdom and sensitivity to the contemporary mood and mindset.

A missionary impulse runs throughout Scripture; God is on a mission to redeem and restore all of creation. As Wright (2010) has stated, “God himself has a mission. . . . And as part of that divine mission, God has called into existence a people to participate with God in the accomplishment of that mission. All *our* mission flows from the prior mission of God” (p. 24; see also Ashford, 2011; Hirsch, 2006). Consequently, the Christian scholar will be guided by this

missional impulse in developing a model of faithfulness. Christians are called to partner with God in his mission to redeem humanity and restore shalom to all of creation.

This missional calling is a general imperative that any Christian can embrace and adapt to their particular vocation. It is not restricted to only those who are called to international missionary work. Rather, the mission field is everywhere, including within each academic discipline and the university at large. As Wright (2010) has noted, “wherever there is ignorance or rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” (p. 27) there is mission. A missional encounter takes place wherever the biblical story intersects with the human story (Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008).

This missional imperative does not dichotomize the sacred and the secular. God’s mission includes all of creation. Under the Lordship of Christ, worship and work, prayer and conversation with friends, and all of life are divinely ordained activities that can bring honor and glory to Christ. Thus, part of the scholars’ task is to think biblically about how to connect research, teaching, and service in the academy to the progress of the gospel in all of its dimensions, bringing shalom and blessing to all the earth.

To integrate faith and scholarship, Christian scholars would be wise to pursue research that engages their academic discipline and, at the same time, engages the needs of the world. By taking this approach, scholars can provide the world with a plausible view of the gospel and their research can be directed toward meeting tangible needs, both physical and spiritual. Thus, any model of faithfulness within the university or an academic discipline must consider the missional calling of the Christian scholar. A key question, then, is this: How does the Christian scholar, guided by the missional imperative, faithfully serve Christ within an academic discipline? An answer to that question depends on one’s definition of an academic discipline.

### **What is an Academic Discipline?**

The language of “transforming the disciplines” is fairly commonplace among Christian scholars (e.g., see Carson, 2008; Neibuhr, 1951). Although a worthy goal, it should *not* be the primary aim of the Christian scholar. Rather, *faithfulness* or *authentic Christian commitment* ought to be the primary aim. As a result of this commitment, an academic discipline will be transformed so that it is more open to the things of God. The primary question for Christian scholars then is not “How do we transform our academic discipline?” but rather, “How do we faithfully live for Christ within our academic discipline?” An answer to either question, however, necessitates understanding the definition of an academic discipline.

Views on how an academic discipline can be understood generally correspond to ways that the notion of scholarship itself is understood. One prominent view, perhaps *the* dominant view of scholarship inherited from the western tradition, is that scholarship is the end result of an objective, unbiased cognitive process of discovery. According to this *naïve factualism* perspective, one engages in the scholarly process by leaving behind one’s biases, prejudgments, and values in order to focus only on the facts that are available to be discovered. Another view of scholarship, prominent of late, argues that there are no objective facts to be discovered—there is no ready-made world—hence, scholarship is the imposing of a perspective on ordinary experience. According to this *social constructivist* view, scholars engage in research as embodied human beings with various background beliefs, prejudgments, values, and practices that inform the process and influence the product of the scholarly enterprise. These two views of scholarship also can be applied to the way in which academic disciplines are defined, each with its own merits and shortcomings. Considering each view in some detail may prove helpful in charting an alternative understanding of an academic discipline, a view I call *perspectival factualism*.

## **Naïve Factualism**

Naïve factualism as a view of scholarship finds self-conscious expression in Francis Bacon's *New Organon* (2000) and his discussion of the "idols of the mind"—that is, the various biases that prevent humans from being wholly rational agents. Bacon's view is that scholars must eliminate these biases in order to conduct scientific research. From this perspective, an academic discipline is best viewed as a bounded collection of objective facts about a particular subject. For example, the academic discipline of physics is composed of the set of facts about elementary particles and atoms and how they interact; the discipline of biology is comprised of a set of facts about living organisms; the discipline of philosophy is a set of facts about the world and its structure, and so on. The scholar is a separate entity, distinct from the academic discipline. He or she engages in various practices with respect to the sets of facts as an objective dispassionate scholar who studies, critiques, and adds to the set of facts through discovery. From this viewpoint, the integration of faith and scholarship equates to bringing the offset of facts from the academic discipline into conformity with the set of facts that comprise a Christian worldview. Thus, authentic Christian commitment for the Christian scholar is in terms of the cognitive content of one's teaching, research, and writing. Scripture plays a normative role, but only in terms of cognitive content, and usually in terms of foundational principles. For example, Wolters (2007) has noted:

If it is true that all scholarly disciplines are shaped to a significant extent by foundational assumptions, and that those assumptions at bottom involve religious choices, then the normative bearing of Scripture on the academic disciplines...is primarily a matter of letting Scripture guide our choice of foundational assumptions. (p. 60)

Wolters assumes that an academic discipline is composed solely of facts and that Scripture's primary role for the scholar is in terms of supplying the correct foundations for theorizing. The integrative task amounts to substituting secular assumptions at the foundations of the discipline with biblically informed assumptions and arguing for their superiority. Hence, faith and scholarship integration is reduced to "checking" the relationships among facts. If a fact from the Christian "book" contradicts a fact from the discipline's "book," then it is the fact from the discipline's "book" that needs to be rejected or modified by the Christian scholar to bring it into consistency with Christianity.

There is much about this view of the academic disciplines that resonates. Each academic discipline has a body of knowledge that is studied, critiqued, and applied to practical problems. Authentic Christian commitment indeed requires that Christian scholars allow their belief-content to inform their theorizing. But naive factualism has its limits. First, it is not clear that the collection of facts that distinguish one academic discipline from another are clearly defined or that various facts necessarily belong to one set instead of another. Recent debates about whether or not intelligent design is considered science or philosophy or religion are illustrative. This debate assumes that there is an essence to science or philosophy or religion when in actuality, from the vantage point of the history of ideas, the set of facts belonging to each group has been fluid. From an historical perspective, many academic disciplines are relatively new. New subdisciplines continue to develop as human knowledge progresses (witness for example, the new field of study *biomimetics* which combines biology and engineering). For a helpful discussion on the origin and development of the academic disciplines, see Lloyd (2009). For a helpful discussion of the problem of how to define, or demarcate science from non-science, see Laudan (1988) and Menuge (2010).

Naïve factualism omits critical elements that seem intimately connected to the academic discipline—namely, values, character, individual and collective narratives, and sets of practices and beliefs that form the culture of the academic discipline. By treating the academic discipline as a collection of facts and its practitioners as objective dispassionate researchers, many aspects of the academic enterprise and its interplay in accessing and interpreting facts are ignored. Moreover, for the Christian scholar, authentic commitment is more than assent to the correct set of facts. Specifically, the Christian scholar is called by God to be a witness, an agent, and evidence of God’s work of redemption and renewal within the academic discipline (Wolterstorff, 1984). As Wolterstorff (2004) has emphasized, the activities of the Christian scholar must contribute to the cause of “justice-in-shalom.” Such a contribution suggests a more robust understanding of an academic discipline and an awareness of other fruitful connections between faith and scholarship.

### **Social Constructivism**

The social constructivist view of scholarship finds self-conscious expression in the words of Nietzsche (1968) who stated, “There are no facts, only interpretations,” (p. 267) and more recently, Derrida (1978) who, when speaking of propositions, noted “the absence of a transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of significations infinitely” (p. 280). According to this view of scholarship, an academic discipline is best understood as an ongoing enterprise in which scholars take their place around a set of problems or phenomena to be studied from a particular perspective in which there is no universal truth. Because there is no objective world, the scholar or group of scholars is invited to find meaning and purpose within a particular narrative. From a social constructivist perspective, it is not possible to engage in scholarship without being influenced by one’s background beliefs, prejudgments, values, and practices that

inform and shape the process as well as the end result of the scholarly enterprise. Thus, the academy is a vast constellation of interests contending for power, and an academic discipline is a social practice from a variety of perspectives, none of which are universally valid or binding.

Within this framework, faithfulness to Christ as scholars is understood primarily in terms of right living. The Christian scholar is expected to embody the values and virtues of Christ, such as love, humility, and wisdom; integration occurs as the Christian scholar grows to maturity in Christ and others are brought into and find meaning within the Christian scholarly community. Scripture has no transcendent import to the university or the life of the mind in general, but is a source of meaning, nourishment, and value for the Christian community of which the scholar is a part.

There is much to commend in the social constructivist view. The failure of the Enlightenment project points to the myth of unbiased, wholly objective rationality. The claim that humans are fundamentally embodied and cannot separate value judgments, background beliefs, and cultural norms from the scholarly enterprise also resonates. These observations are important epistemological points. They do not, however, justify the further metaphysical claims that there is no objective reality or ready-made world and that humans cannot know such a world.

### **Perspectival Factualism**

*Contra* social constructivism, the actual practices of most scholars in the academy suggest there is a ready-made world. Thus, the scholarly task is fundamentally one of discovery, not world-making. (For a helpful discussion of the issues surrounding the realism/anti-realism debate in science, see the collection of essays in Leplin (1984); for a helpful survey of the actual views of practicing scientists, including the religious views of scientists, see Ecklund, 2010.)

*Contra* naïve factualism, the actual practices of most scholars in the academy suggest that learning and discovery are not merely disembodied activities of wholly rational agents (see Clouser, 2005; Wolterstorff, 2004). Thus, the scholarly task is fundamentally social and perspectival. Perspectival factualism incorporates these insights in what I believe is a more accurate understanding of how an academic discipline is identified and defined. Academic disciplines are indeed factual. But the scholarly enterprise is one approached from a variety of perspectives that each provides unique cognitive access to the phenomenon to be studied or the problem to be solved. As Wolterstorff (2004) has argued, individual narrative identities “enable, rather than obstruct, access to dimensions of reality” (p. 239). The advantage of this perspective for the Christian scholar is that because scholarship is inherently social and perspectival, it can be argued that various narrative identities, including a distinctly Christian perspective, ought to be welcomed within each academic discipline.

Such an understanding of the scholarly enterprise finds justification from within the Christian worldview. In his masterful work, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*, Noll (2011) argued that

the particularity at the center of Christianity justifies a rooted, perspectival understanding of truth that embraces unabashedly the crucial significance of all other particularities of time, place, cultural value, and social location....[as well as a] confidence in the possibility of universal truth. (p. 58)

Shorn of both naturalistic and postmodern baggage, this understanding of the notion of scholarship and an academic discipline provides a perspective that is both congruent with the actual understanding and practices of many scholars and fruitful enough to guide the Christian

scholar in the integrative task. Perspectival factualism also offers support for the contention that faithfulness to Christ will transform an academic discipline.

Often the integration of faith and scholarship is advanced among Christian scholars as a foolproof method for transforming an academic discipline. Transformation of the academic discipline is the goal. Various strategies for faith and scholarship integration are identified, each with merits and shortcomings. Some strategies for integration are argued to be superior and a resultant course of action is prescribed so that an academic discipline will be transformed. I suggest that the goal of transformation is noble, but misplaced. Instead, the goal ought to be faithfulness to Christ, and a likely result will be the transformation of a discipline.

To illustrate, Hasker (1992) has asserted there are three approaches for how to engage an academic discipline as a Christian scholar. The compatibilist strategy presupposes the actual harmony of the Christian faith with an academic discipline and seeks to demonstrate how such assumptions can be profitably shared. The transformationist strategy finds some basic validity and integrity between the Christian faith and the academic discipline, as well as some areas of discord that need to be changed. Finally, the reconstructionist strategy finds a fundamental tension between the assumptions and claims of an existing academic discipline and the Christian faith and seeks to completely reconstruct a discipline from its foundation.

Given perspectival factualism and a missional approach to faith and scholarship integration, I find merit for adopting a transformationist vision (not strategy) as the likely outcome of faithfulness to Christ within the academy. In a fallen world, the idea that any existent academic discipline would or could ever achieve complete compatibility with the theory and ideal practices of the Christian scholar or the Christian community of scholars is absurd. Pluralism in the academy is a reality; hence, the compatibilist vision is not possible (see

Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 214-215). Yet, a reconstructionist vision is equally unrealistic and even unnecessary. There is much within an academic discipline that the Christian scholar can affirm. The belief that all people are created in the image of God, the doctrine of common grace, and personal experience testify to the fact that non-Christians can and often do find the truth on any particular matter. In addition, there are many assumptions employed within an academic discipline that are not explicitly Christian, yet can be embraced by the Christian scholar. The Christian can provide a unique grounding for these assumptions (e.g., the uniformity of nature or the assumption that rationality is possible), whereas other scholars within an academic discipline might not be able to justify why such assumptions are valid.

Thus, the transformationist vision seems to be a middle view between two extremes. The Christian scholar can affirm that which can be affirmed, confront that which needs to be confronted, and address ideas that are antithetical to Scripture that may be held by others in the discipline. Given perspectival factualism, this transformative vision is not understood merely in terms of the integration of the subject matter of a discipline with the cognitive content of the Christian faith. As I will outline in the next section, an academic discipline is composed of much more, and the “much more” provides many additional points of gospel connection for the Christian scholar.

### **The Anatomy of an Academic Discipline**

An academic discipline is comprised of four components (see Figure 1): (1) at the foundation are guiding principles (2) which in turn inform the discipline’s guiding methodology, (3) which informs how scholars approach the data set, (4) and these combined components help give shape to the guiding narrative—the individual and collective narratives of the discipline.

**Guiding principles.** Guiding principles are variously called “control beliefs” (Wolterstorff, 1984, 2004), “background beliefs” (Marsden, 1997), “core values” (Poe, 2004), “faith presuppositions” (Edlin, 2009), and “feasibility assumptions” (Menuge, 2010). I define a guiding principle as follows:

*Guiding principle:* a belief held by a scholar that operates as a constraint on theory acceptance and a signpost for theory discovery.

Actual guiding principles within a particular academic discipline include beliefs about the logical or aesthetic structure of a theory, beliefs about the entities that can comprise a theory, beliefs about how the world operates, and so on. According to Wolterstorff (1984),

[Guiding principles] function in two ways. Because we hold them we are led to *reject* certain sorts of theories—some because they are inconsistent with those beliefs; others because, though consistent with our [guiding principles], they do not comport well with those beliefs. On the other hand [guiding principles] also lead us to *devise* theories. We want theories that are consistent with our [guiding principles]. Or, to put it more stringently, we want theories that comport as well as possible with those beliefs. (p. 68)

I suggest that within each academic discipline, there are various guiding principles that are well accepted within the discipline and form the culture of the discipline (see also Ecklund, 2010). When pressed to justify why a belief functions as a guiding principle within an academic discipline, the scholar is often without an answer. It is possible, indeed likely, that some of the guiding principles held by a scholarly community are inconsistent or contradictory. Often for the Christian seeking admittance into the scholarly community, the acceptance of the guiding principles of an academic discipline occurs during their training period as a graduate student and with little reflection on whether or not these beliefs comport with the Christian faith.

Many of the dominant guiding principles within the academy are not difficult to identify. For example, much of contemporary science is guided by verificationism (an epistemological principle that only sentences which are empirically verifiable are useful), functionalism and materialism (metaphysical principles that there is no actual teleology to be found in nature), and a fact-value dichotomy (which entails that scholarship ought to be “value-free”). Examples of such principles in operation within science are abundant. Craig (2007) has asserted that virtually the whole of 20<sup>th</sup> century physics has been derailed by the defective epistemology of verificationism. The materialist and functionalist assumptions of Darwinian evolution within the biological literature have become a *sine qua non* of legitimate scientific theorizing. Add to this the vocal polemic of the New Atheists such as Dawkins (2008), Harris (2004), and Dennett (2006), and there are numerous examples of all of these principles at work in contemporary science.

Other principles, perhaps more prevalent in the humanities, include skepticism (an epistemological principle that there is no, or limited domains of, knowledge), anti-realism (a metaphysical principle that there is no ready-made world), and the ethical imperative of tolerance. Many of these principles can be seen in Fish’s (2008) claim that any political, moral, or religious issue must be “academicized” for it to become a legitimate field of study within the academy:

The name I give to this process whereby politically explosive issues [or moral or religious issues] are made into subjects of intellectual inquiry is “academicizing.” To academicize a topic is to detach it from the context of its real world urgency, where there is a vote to be taken or an agenda to be embraced, and insert it into a context of academic urgency, where there is an account to be offered or an analysis to be performed. (p. 27)

In other words, it is possible to learn *about* morality, about literature, or about how various people think about these issues, but what we cannot do, what does not belong in the academy is to learn *from* them, or to discover the truth about them in a way that demands an existential response. For, given the fact/value dichotomy, there is no truth of the matter when it comes to moral, political, or religious issues; there is only opinion and belief. Thus one is expected to *tolerate* different opinions on such things since there is no truth of the matter.

Fish (2008) has argued that the liberal arts disciplines are the study of the beliefs people hold and why. Although such guiding principles as skepticism, anti-realism, and the ethical imperative of tolerance are most prominent within the humanities, they can be found in the sciences as well—for example, consider the recent anti-realism articulated by Hawking and Mlodinow (2010) in their widely-discussed book *The Grand Design*.

An important lesson about the lack of neutrality in the university has emerged from this discussion. Neutrality is a myth. As Wolters (2007) has argued, “All scholarly disciplines are shaped to a significant extent by foundational assumptions, and...those assumptions at bottom involve religious choices” (p. 60). Thus, every subject emanates from a set of guiding principles that need to be identified and critiqued as a necessary component of discovering the truth (Edlin, 2009). This critique of assumptions is what, in fact, allows for the possibility of a foundation to learning in the academy that is both distinctly Christian and viewed as legitimate.

**A guiding methodology.** The methodology a scholar employs is informed by the guiding principles held within the discipline. For example, the materialism that dominates much of contemporary science has led to the postulation of methodological naturalism (see Menuge, 2010) as the proper approach to true science, wherein science must proceed as if nature is all there is. God’s creative activity can be invoked in seeking to understand nature, but at that point

the scientist has taken off her lab coat and ceased doing science. Part of the motivation for methodological naturalism is the belief that such an approach will allow science to unproblematically proceed free from religious bias or metaphysical dogma. Yet such a view is unrealistic, as there is no such thing as neutrality in methodology, either. Perhaps science in particular, and learning in general, would be better served if scholars wore their religious and metaphysical principles on their sleeves, since they employ them at every level of the scholarly process.

**A data set.** The data set of an academic discipline encompasses the specific domain of knowledge that is studied. In biology, it is living cells. In mathematics, it is numbers and their relations. The data set itself may or may not be explicitly religious or have explicit religious implications. It is important to note that Christian scholars do not arrive at their data set any differently than their non-Christian colleagues. In the same manner as other scholars, scholars who are Christian make observations and reflect on the world around them in accumulating data. However, even when considering a discipline's data set, there is no such thing as neutrality. Consider the debate within philosophy over the nature of causation. What is the *paradigm case*, or perfect example, of causation that is accepted as the data set to be analyzed? Since at least the time of the philosopher Hume, it has been the white billiard ball impacting other billiard balls. Thus, an analysis of causation will be in terms of how one physical object affects another physical object. But, prior to the modern era, the paradigm case of causation was not the relation between two physical objects, but rather mental or agent causation. Contemporary discussions of causation typically proceed under the assumption that there is only one kind of causation to be analyzed, event causation; the presence of this assumption is due to the fact that even the data set of a discipline is shaped by its guiding principles and methodologies.

**A guiding narrative.** The guiding narrative of a discipline includes the history of the western mindset as well as the specific history of the discipline; it includes the various theories held at various times (historical and contemporary) and individual scholars (historical and contemporary) who develop, analyze, and defend them. For example, in philosophy there are notable scholars such as Thales, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Hume, Locke, Berkeley, Hegel, Husserl, Sartre, Plantinga, Chomsky, Searle and myriads of lesser-known figures. There is Platonism, Aristotelianism, Scholasticism, Empiricism, Rationalism, and many other philosophies. In astronomy, there is the geocentric model of Ptolemy and the heliocentric model of Copernicus; in physics, scholars have argued for absolute Newtonian space and time as well as Einsteinian relativity; in mathematics thinkers such as Pythagorus, Euclid, Cantor, Godel, Carnap, and Tarski have advocated Logicism, Formalism, Intuitionism, and more. Each academic discipline has a history, a narrative full of intrigue, sub-plot, climax, paradigm shift, honest toil and ill-begotten gain. These individual narratives as well as the collective narrative of the discipline provide many points of contact for a missionary encounter.

### **Missional Connections within an Academic Discipline**

The missional imperative suggests that part of the Christian scholarly task is to seek to make gospel connections within the academic disciplines. The goal is not a conversion of academic disciplines to correspond to a distinctly Christian perspective. Rather, Christian scholars should be principled pluralists in the academy—allowing, even encouraging various perspectives to compete in the market place of ideas for the mantle of truth. Such a posture requires the conviction that, ultimately, truth is found within a Christian view of reality and intellectual humility, as we admit our finitude and fallenness in theory construction and evaluation. Thus far, I have argued that an academic discipline is best understood as a book of

facts accessed from a variety of perspectives. I have described the anatomy of an academic discipline in terms of a four-layered triangle (Figure 1). In this final section I will explicate the missional crossroads that can be discerned at all levels of the academic discipline, thus providing a truly holistic account of faith and scholarship integration. By highlighting examples of faithfulness in research, teaching, and service by Christian scholars, I hope to demonstrate the viability and possible applications of the model developed in this essay.

### **Guiding Principles and the Christian Scholar**

There is both a negative and positive aspect to a missional encounter at the foundation of an academic discipline. According to Poe (2004), “the first responsibility of a Christian scholar to his or her discipline is to offer the discipline a critique of its prevailing [guiding principles]” (2004, p. 173). A major task of the Christian scholar is to uncover the guiding principles that inform his or her academic discipline. There will be much that a Christian scholar can affirm about a particular discipline’s guiding principles. However, there will be much that needs confrontation as well, and these provide an opportunity for missional engagement in the classroom, departmental hallways, and in research.

The responsibility of critical engagement with a particular discipline is an important and necessary task of the Christian scholar within the academy. However, although it might be the Christian scholar’s first responsibility, it is not the only responsibility. There is also the scholar’s contribution to knowledge. This contribution is best understood within the context of a larger kingdom and a more comprehensive framework of reality. This larger context informs the Christian’s guiding principles. As Poe (2004) has noted: “Faith intersects an academic discipline at the point where it asks its most fundamental questions....Faith intersects where a discipline

establishes its core values, upon whatever basis they are founded” (p. 138). Wolterstorff (1984) asserted a similar view two decades earlier:

The Christian scholar ought to allow the belief-content of his authentic Christian commitment to function as control within his devising and weighing of theories. For he like everyone else ought to seek consistency, wholeness, and integrity in the body of his beliefs and commitments. (p. 76)

Plantinga (1997), speaking to scientists, likewise argued that “a Christian academic and scientific community ought to pursue science in its own way, *starting from* and taking for granted what we know as Christians” (p. 144).

What are the guiding principles that a Christian scholar ought to employ? Noll’s (2011) suggestion is a good place to start: the reality of Jesus Christ is foundational to the “rationale, means, methods, paradigms, and telos” (p. 148-149) of the Christian scholarly enterprise. According to Noll, the creeds about Christ are foundational to Christian scholarship. Christ is the source and telos of all things, including all truths that can be discovered.

I propose to extend Noll’s (2011) point by suggesting four principles that can serve as guides for the Christian scholar, grounded more broadly in the character and actions of the Triune God, as follows (see Figure 2).

Unity Thesis (UT): all truth is connected and unified.

Objectivity Thesis (OT): there is a mind independent reality that we can discover.

Scripture Thesis (ST): Scripture makes knowledge claims about the nature of God, the world and the self.

Gospel Thesis (GT): Humanity’s greatest need is the gospel.

Many in the academy, not only Christians, affirm belief in a mind-independent world and the unity of truth. But it is the reality of God that provides a sufficient grounding for these two theses. As the creator of all reality distinct from Himself, God is the source of both the unity and diversity in nature. Further, as creator, all knowledge points to the divine. There is no area of inquiry that needs to be hermetically sealed off from another. Science and religion, faith and reason do not inherently compete. Since there is a unity to all things known, grounded in the triune creator God, the Christian scholar finds justification for Plantinga's (1997) claim that all one knows should be used in trying to understand a given phenomenon.

Regarding the Scripture Thesis, God has revealed Himself to humanity propositionally through Scripture. Hence the Bible is an authoritative source of knowledge that Christians ought to allow to guide research and constrain theory formation. However, Scriptural guidance of research does not entail that Christian scholarship always needs to be explicitly so. As I have noted elsewhere (Gould, 2007), Christian scholarship also can be purely vocational or implicitly Christian, meaning that the guiding principles of Christian scholarship are operative but function more as the architecture of thought.

Finally, the Gospel Thesis also finds its justification in the nature and activity of God. The true story of humankind begins with creation and ends with the new creation. In this fallen world, humanity's greatest need is to find redemption through Christ. Indeed, all of creation "has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Romans 8:22) to be redeemed and restored. Lovingly, God sent His Son to redeem and restore humankind and the world. God called His followers to participate in this mission to redeem and restore all of creation. This reality, encapsulated in the Gospel Thesis, informs the posture of the scholarly enterprise for the Christian. This thesis helps the Christian scholar to see that scholarship is both an end in itself

(that is, the pursuit of knowledge is an intrinsic good in no need of further justification) as well as a means to an end (that is, scholarship justifies itself in terms of meeting the physical and spiritual needs of others). Further, the Gospel Thesis affects the kind of research in which Christian scholars might choose to engage, perhaps pursuing research programs that seem most pressing in terms of the progress of the gospel and ushering in shalom. For example, Bradley's (2007) discussion of designing and building bridges in remote locations in Africa and his study of how to use coconuts to produce electricity in Papua New Guinea were both motivated out of a Christian concern to meet the needs of others.

### **Guiding Methodologies and the Christian Scholar**

Sometimes, a Christian's methodology might be different than a non-Christian's methodology. For example, Christians ought not to be beholden to methodological naturalism when engaging in science, or more generally, scholarship. Sometimes, Christian scholars can and should operate as such as long as they allow the evidence to speak for itself. There is no reason for the Christian scholar to stipulate at the front end of inquiry that "only naturalistic explanations" are allowed. A guiding methodology that is supported by the four principles just elucidated is what Menuge (2010) has labeled "methodological realism." Menuge stated, "the antidote [to methodological naturalism] is a return to intellectually honest vulnerability to the truth about reality, whether it supports our expectations or not, in other words, a return to [methodological realism]" (p. 393). The idea is that the world is ours to discover and interpret, but not to be dogmatically anticipated.

The Christian scholar, guided by the Scripture Thesis, must wrestle with his or her understanding of God's interaction in the world. After creating the world, does God intervene in the natural world both redemptively and creatively, or just redemptively? What is the role of

secondary causes in a world created by God? The theological doctrines of creation, divine providence, and the place of chance in a world created and sustained by God will inform the Christian scholar's methodology. What should be obvious is that there is room for disagreement among Christians. Further, no guiding methodology remains above critique. Faithfulness to Christ requires that Christian scholars be students of theology and allow their theology to inform their methodology. Both Plantinga (2011) and Rau (2012) have offered helpful discussions of various models of God's interaction in the natural world, including the resultant methodologies for the Christian scholar.

### **Data and the Christian Scholar**

Christian scholars approach the data set of a discipline from a distinctively Christian perspective. This perspective gives the Christian scholar a unique cognitive access point to reality. The Christian scholar will see things that others may not see. Guided by the four principles I have outlined, the Christian scholar will find motivation for further investigation, a foundation from which to ask critical questions, and a framework in which to interpret the data.

The conviction that God created the world in such a way that human cognition can apprehend it will fuel further discovery. For example, it is widely documented that, historically, Christianity led to the rise of modern science (e.g., see Stark, 2003). Belief in the uniformity of nature, the rationality of humankind, and the comprehensibility of the universe are truths brought *to* the data set of science, not truths deduced *from* the data set. One eminent scientist speaks of the "unreasonable efficacy of mathematics in the natural sciences" (Wigner, as cited in Plantinga, 2011, p. 284). The Christian scholar will not be surprised that the world is significantly describable in the language of mathematics, for the world is created with order and purpose by a divine mind. As Plantinga (2011) has argued, there is deep concord between

Christianity and the conclusions of mathematics and science. This deep concord can be expected within all the academic disciplines, given the reality of God as creator. The Christian scholar is pursuing God's thoughts when engaging the data of the discipline, which can inspire hope, perseverance, and confidence that there is truth to be found.

The Christian scholar may also have a different set of questions and concerns than others, with the result that the Christian scholar may approach the data set differently. Poe (2004) has emphasized asking critical questions in exploring the implications of the data for theory construction. In asking critical questions, one's faith commitments play a key role. Examples of critical questions Christian scholars could ask from a faith perspective can easily be supplied: for example, in political science, "What is the role of forgiveness in international relations?"; in English, "What accounts for objective meaning in the text?"; in computer science, "What are the limits of artificial intelligence, given the physicality of computers?" Poe has provided an extended list of critical questions that can be asked within each discipline. Insightful questions from a Christian perspective help to advance understanding of the data set and can push students and colleagues to recognize error in their own ways of thinking.

Finally, a Christian perspective influences one's interpretation of the data. For example, Niels Bohr became a Hindu and interpreted the data of quantum mechanics from that perspective. According to Bohr, the world only appears to be real, and in actuality, the world is constructed by observers (as cited in Poe, 2004). Alternatively, the Christian may hold that the wave-particle phenomenon is not so surprising in a world created by a Triune God (Poe, 2004). Hence the discoveries and principles of quantum mechanics provide evidence in favor of Christianity. If the Christian scholar believes there is no place for chance in the world, the discoveries of quantum mechanics will be interpreted either deterministically or from an anti-

realist view (e.g., see van Fraassen, 1980). If the Christian scholar believes there is a place for chance in a world created by God, the discoveries of quantum mechanics will likely be interpreted indeterministically and realistically (e.g., see van Inwagen, 1988). The guiding principles adopted by scholars influence how the data set is interpreted and the Christian is within his or her epistemic rights to bring Christianity to bear in theory construction.

### **The Guiding Narrative and the Christian Scholar**

Because an academic discipline is composed of individual scholars and the narratives in which they find meaning, another important aspect of the missional encounter for Christian scholars is that they are called to be witnesses to their colleagues, administrators, and students within the university. Being a faithful witness includes, when appropriate, gospel proclamation, as well as Christ-likeness in moral character and being a member of good standing in the academic community. Faithfulness to Christ in the academy involves embracing the missional imperative and living a life of wholeness before all.

Missional opportunities are ever present, many of which can be naturally integrated into the normal activities of the academic life. For example, Ken Elzinga (2001), Professor of Economics at the University of Virginia, applies the Biblical principle of servanthood to his teaching by mastering the material, setting aside substantial class preparation time, and regularly praying *for* and *with* his students when they visit during office hours. Marc Compere, professor of mechanical engineering at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, models how a professor can serve students, the needs of others, and the university by applying his academic expertise to real-world problems. After a devastating earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010, clean water was difficult to find. As a result, in many villages Haitian children suffered from coughs, runny noses, and chronic diarrhea. Without electricity, water purification systems were useless. When

Compere heard about the need for clean water, he gathered together some of his students, built a solar-powered water purification unit, and in the summer of 2010 went with his students to Haiti to install the new purifier (<http://daytonabeach.erau.edu/coe/mechanical-engineering/research/project-haiti.html>). What a powerful picture of professors and students, both Christian and non-Christian, working together to make a difference.

The narrative aspect of an academic discipline also points to a rich source of guidance and community for the Christian scholar. Within each academic discipline, there undoubtedly is a strain of Christian thinking as well as practitioners, both historical and contemporary, who can serve as guides and mentors for young Christian scholars. The existence and vibrancy of many Christian scholarly societies today provide a rich source of community, guidance, and resources for both seasoned and less-experienced Christian scholars. This alternative community, based on a shared Christian vision of life, and dependent on the grace of God, can serve as a powerful and attractive witness to the contemporary secular university. Faithfulness as Christian scholars not only entails concern for the product of scholarship, but also for those who create and consume the product.

### **Conclusion**

The approach to faith-scholarship integration advocated in this essay is not an “add Jesus and stir” approach to faith and scholarship integration. Rather, faithfulness to Christ requires that the Christian scholar live a missional life in the academy by seeking a missionary encounter within each level of his or her academic discipline. In this essay, I have outlined what such an encounter might entail. Within the academy, the desirable result is the transformation of academic disciplines so that the gospel will get a fair hearing and lives will be changed. Beyond the walls of the academy, the desirable result of such faithfulness is the translation of ideas into

tools that bring justice to the oppressed, nourishment to the poor, and shalom in all areas of life. As Wolterstorff (1984) has stated, “One’s following of Christ...ought to be actualized by taking up in decisively ultimate fashion God’s call to share in the task of being witness, agent, and evidence of the coming of his kingdom” (p. 74). May it be so.

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Figures:

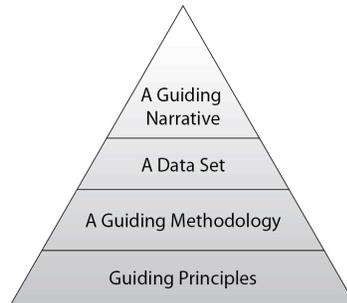


Figure 1: The Anatomy of an Academic Discipline

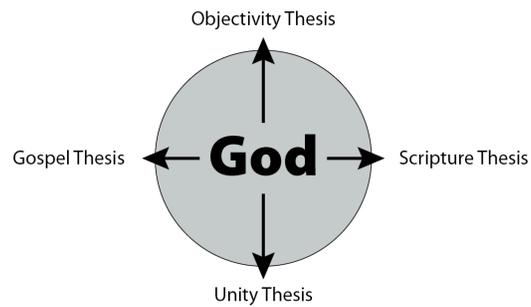


Figure 2: God provides the grounding for each guiding principle